

THE DOWNFALL OF MAURICE FAVERSHAM

WALTER SHEDLOFSKY
Saint Louis, Missouri

Monday, May 23

Coroner Michael Hobbs: Court is now in session. This inquest has been convened to inquire into the death of Sir Maurice Faversham, who was found dead last Saturday, May 21, in the hall of his ancestral home in the town of Audley End. We shall now hear from those persons who have an interest in this matter.

Police Constable James Smythe: I received a call last Saturday morning about 0730 from Miss Patricia Townes. She said there had been an accident and that her uncle was dead. When I arrived at the scene of the accident, she and her brother, Jonathan Townes, were waiting for me. I found Sir Maurice Faversham face down on the marble floor about ten feet from the staircase. The right arm of the dead man was flung out from his body and several feet away from his open hand was that heavy juniper cane. Two sets of fingerprints were found on the cane, that of the dead man and that of his niece, Patricia Townes. The left hand of the dead man was clenched. When I pried open his fingers, I found a piece of paper with the following statement:

Sir Maurice lies dead with deep stoved in pate. Truth's message initial. Life was not great. Evil thoughts connived, earnest skill contrived. Please weirdly repeat or down fall will not state.

Medical Examiner Anthony Tyler: Death was caused by a very severe blow to the skull. The wound had a peculiar imprint that corresponded to the irregular carved top of the cane. From conditions of the corpse, I surmise death had occurred at 0600 that Saturday morning.

William Carruthers, Solicitor and Executor of the Will: Under the provisions of the original will, the estate would have gone to Mrs. Jacqueline Faversham, wife of the dead man. However, when she had been killed about a month ago in an automobile accident on Paxley Motorway, Sir Faversham confided to me that it had been no accident; but he did not change his will. After taxes the estate will go to his nephew and niece, Jonathan and Patricia Townes.

Jonathan Townes: I am an auto mechanic and had inspected the car my aunt had driven the day of the accident. My uncle claimed the accident had been due to faulty brakes, but I swear the brakes were in perfect working order. Last Saturday morning, my sister knocked on my door and when I opened it she told me there had been an accident and that my uncle was dead. My room is about

twenty feet away from the top of the staircase and I didn't hear the fall of my uncle.

Patricia Townes: My room is across from Jonathan's. I didn't hear the sound of my uncle's fall. However, I am an early riser and at 0715 I decided to go downstairs to make breakfast. I went down the staircase carefully since some of the risers are taller than the others. When I reached the bottom, I saw my uncle sprawled face down on the marble floor. I rushed over to his side and checked for a sign of life, but there was no pulse. I then called the police. As for my fingerprints on the cane, I had given that cane to my uncle as a birthday present.

Meredith Markworthy: Coroner Hobbs has given me permission to speak. Though Sir Faversham and I were not the best of friends, we both had been fellows at Jesus College, Cambridge, at the same time. Sir Faversham had a vindictive nature with a warped sense of justice. I can remember several classmates whose lives had been made miserable by him. One case I recall very well was Anthony Armbruster. He had done exceptionally well in a test, but on an accusation instigated by Faversham, a search was made of Armbruster's rooms. Armbruster unlocked his desk and, much to his surprise, a copy of the test questions was found. He denied putting them there. A strange poetic note also was found, but by the time I solved it, Armbruster had been expelled. Now, like then, the stage has been set. Only in this case murder is implied. The unusual distance of the body from the bottom stair. The inference that Sir Faversham could prove that the car in which his wife met her untimely death had not been properly repaired. The inference that only Patricia Townes could have struck the fatal blow. Or perhaps the act of a deranged mind, grief-stricken over the death of his wife, but willing to implicate others for murder, yet cursed with a warped sense of justice. I am positive the solution to this case lies in that note that was found in the dead man's hand. If you will give me time -- a day should be sufficient -- I will have the answer.

Coroner Michael Hobbs: Court will reconvene tomorrow, same time.

Tuesday, May 24

Coroner Michael Hobbs: Court is reconvened.

Meredith Markworthy: I have lettered the solution on the blackboard. I have followed the instructions as indicated in the note, and as you initially can see, Sir Maurice Faversham contrived his own demise:

Sir Maurice lies dead with deep stoved in pate.
Truth's message initial. Life was not great.
Evil thoughts connived, earnest skill contrived.
Please weirdly repeat or downfall will not state.

By a slight rearrangement of the lines, another message is initially revealed:

Sir Maurice lies dead with deep stoved in pate.
 Truth's message initial. Life was not great.
 Evil thoughts connived,
 Earnest skill contrived.
 Please weirdly repeat or downfall will not state.

THE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CROSSWORD WORDS

What are crossword words? They are those three-, four-, and five-letter words which crossword constructors have found convenient to use for the past fifty years. In the March 1925 issue of *The Enigma*, the publication of the National Puzzlers' League, Rufus T. Strohm wrote:

An old, familiar company
 Swept in review beneath my ken --
 The somewhat egoistic ME,
 The Nipponese twins, SEN and YEN,
 And RA, the sun god from the Nile,
 With IDA, IRA, SAM and TED,
 And EKE with ERA vied the while,
 And ODES with OPEN, ZEE with ZED ...
 In vain I search for some new word
 To give my jaded brain a thrill;
 The EMU, large Australian bird,
 And SPA, the spring, are with us still ...

This book, compiled by Michael Donner and Norton J. Bra-mesco, lists about 2500 such words (including SEN, YEN, EMU and IRA in the poem above). Each is briefly defined, and the pronunciation indicated; many are illustrated as well. The format is attractive (less than ten words per page), inviting browsing.

The book is available in paperback from the Workman Publishing Company for \$9.95. It is recommended to all lovers of odd words, from *orle* to *lubra*, from *glume* to *stoup*, from *vugh* to *avahi*. Bon appetit!